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HOW TO BE A

COMIC BOOK ARTIST

...NOT JUST HOW TO DRAW

By Tim Seeley

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How to be a Comic Book Artist... Not Just How to Draw
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HOW TO BE A

COMIC BOOK ARTIST

...NOT JUST HOW TO DRAW

BY TIM SEELEY

COMIC BOOK ARTIST JOB DESCRIPTION - An illustrator who translates a script into sequential illustrations subsequently published in comic magazine format, shipping on a periodic basis, usually monthly.

CHAPTER ONE
SO YA WANNA BE A PENCIL-MONKEY...

Slingin' lead. Drawing hot girls and huge, grimacing dudes. The adoring fans. The huge wads of cash. Oh... the glory. All this and more can be yours when you become a member of one of the most exclusive clubs on Earth: The Legion of Comic Book Artists. Buy this book and find out how...

Did you buy the book? Good, I figured that would do it. Sucker. My name is Tim Seeley and I'm a comic book artist. Within these pages I'm going to attempt to teach you everything I know about being a comic book artist. Now, notice I didn't say I was going to try to teach you how to draw. The simple fact is, no 22-page manual is going to teach you how to draw. The ability to draw comes from a combination of natural skill, desire, and lots of practice. I mean...lots and lots. This book isn't going to teach you how to draw the muscles of the forearm or the pleats in a manga chick's skirt. There are plenty of books out there for that, some of them amazingly good, and a lot of them horribly bad. No, my little friend, this book is going to teach you how to be an honest-to-damn-goodness comic book artist.

WHAT DO I KNOW?

First things first. You should probably be asking, "well, who the hell are you?" That's a good question, buddy. You should check the credentials of anyone who's trying to sell you something. I mean, you wouldn't want to learn karate from a guy who sells lawnmowers and happens to watch a lot of chop socky flicks, right? So, here's my favorite part...the part where I get to talk about myself and you just sit there with a glazed look in your eye and wait for me to finish...

My name is Tim Seeley. I'm 29-years-old and I've been drawing comics professionally for five years. I've drawn *G.I. Joe, Forgotten Realms, Kore, Lovebunny and Mr. Hell, Hack/Slash,* and some other assorted stuff. I draw one and a half pages a day and I've never missed a deadline. Before drawing comics, I worked as staff artist at an educational children's book company. You know, those crappy black and white drawings on the handouts your teacher gave you? That was me. I have a BFA in Illustration from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

I've been reading comics since I was 5-years-

old. I love the damn things. When I was ten, I started doing my own comics, which I would lend to my friends to read. My first effort was the appropriately named *Very Very Stupid Comics*, which was inspired by my love for *Mad* and *Cracked* magazines.

From that I moved on to telling a bunch of overly complex and melodramatic superhero stories, always starring women with very tight costumes and big...hair. Over the years, I've figured out that, while I love drawing, it was always the process of making stuff up that I really loved, so I've tried to both write and draw comics. In 2003, I came up with *Hack/Slash*, a horror/comedy comic about a pair of slasher hunters. It ended up gradually finding an audience and eventually even was optioned as a movie by Rogue Pictures.

I'm a firm believer in art being second to story, and a harmonious relationship between comic art and comic script is very important to me. I know I'm not the most in-demand "hot" artist in the biz and I'm aware that there are lots of old pros who know a lot more than me, but I've learned a lot in the time I've worked in this field, and I think my track record entitles me to teach a few things. Also, I have a girlfriend named Gina who sings when she gets ready in the morning. I like fruity drinks. I wear boxers. Is that enough for ya? Good.

THE AWFUL TRUTH ABOUT BEING A COMIC BOOK ARTIST

All right, I want to get something out of the way right off the bat. Drawing comics probably seems like the coolest job on Earth. I go to a lot of comic conventions and I can tell you, it seems like more people want to draw comics than want to read comics. Drawing comics is on the list of creative jobs that people would give their first child to have…somewhere on the list after Rock Star and Salma Hayek's Personal Massager. But, like any job, comic illustration has its downsides. You should know them before you go charging helmet first into this, here's a list of the major ones:

1 When people think of comic art, they think of the splash pages...the covers, the spreads...basically the really fun shit to draw. The truth is, being a comic artist is a bit like being a cop. It looks exciting, but it's mostly paperwork.

When drawing, remember the 30/70 rule. 30% of everything you draw is totally fun—big splash pages, cool monsters, cute girls—stuff that really gets your pencil flying. 70% of everything you draw is the obligatory car and garbage cans. It's the background stuff: the bushes, the rocks in the background, the panels of people sitting in couches watching tv. It ain't glorious, it can be tedious, and sometimes it saps your will to lift a pencil ever again. But, you have to do it, and do it well. Wipe that drool off your face and get scribbling.

2 Comic book drawing is a lonely job; you'll likely spend every day in your studio or at the table in your kitchen staring at the same surface. Your social skills may atrophy from lack of human contact. You might say weird things at parties like, "drawing the muscles on a horse is very sensual." I work in a studio so I have people to talk to...but I worked freelance for three weeks and it drove me nuts. Everyday I'd lie in wait for my roommate to come home from work, ready to spring and satisfy my need for human conversation. The notion of working at home sounds awesome, but never having to put on pants can be bad for your social life.

3 Like any "art job", drawing comics can be awful damn stressful for not much pay. At least in the beginning, most comic artists are working another job. Those first gigs pay pretty poorly, if at all. And, deadlines in comics can be a beast...comic companies, large and small, are known for changing their deadlines mid-production, leading to all-nighters, eye strain, and... umm...hemorrhoids (I dunno...it could happen). And, anyone who does comics thinking they'll get rich is a moron. A successful comic artist can make a living, but there's far fewer rich comic artists than there are rich dentists, lawyers, celebrity im-

personators or bear trainers. It's a rough, competitive biz. If you actually broke down the numbers, you probably have a better chance of getting rich from the insurance money after being bitten by someone's poodle. Those few comic creators who get to buy million dollar baseballs and such tend to obtain their wealth not by pushing pencils, but by spinning off their creations and good name into other business ventures.

ON THE UPSIDE

Are you still here? Good. I had to get that out of the way. I just want to make sure people know what they're getting into...consider that the comic book version of what Guns and Rose's "Welcome to the Jungle" does for bright eyed starlets heading to LA. Feel my...my...serpentine.

Of course, there are a million great things about being a comic book artist. I know I personally don't mind when the weekend ends and I even forget to take my vacation. The fans are great, and when someone really likes your work, there's not much that's more fulfilling. Being a comic book artist also comes with a strange sort of minor fame. It's not intrusive or annoying, but it's certainly pretty cool when someone is excited to meet you, or when you get to hobnob with real celebrities. Best of all, seeing your name and art published in an honest-to-goodness comic and contributing to the best damn medium in the universe is its own reward. ***Viva la comics!***

CHAPTER TWO
WHATCHOO NEED

One of the first things people usually ask me when I'm sitting at a con (besides "what's that blue pencil for?" and "is that contagious?") is "do you have to go to school for this?"

The flat answer is "nope." You don't need a degree to be a comic artist. No editor will ever ask for your grade point average or transcripts. If you're good enough, you don't need to have gone though seventh grade. No one cares.

Does that mean you shouldn't go to college? Well, hold on there bucko.

Personally, I highly recommend getting a four year degree. Comic art is a tough field and you may very well need a back up plan. A decent back up plan. Also, a four year school can give you a well-rounded education that can be amazingly useful for drawing comics. I didn't know Anthropology 101 or History of Native American Art would ever come in useful, but both have found their way into my drawing. And, last but not least, even if all your art teachers are hacks, those Life Drawing courses are invaluable. Without the backdrop of liberal higher education, it can be pretty difficult to convince people with various body types to come to your house and stand there naked. Life Drawing is probably the single most important thing a comic book artist can train in. No matter what you draw, it will involve figures, and no matter what your style is, you need to know the figure before you can mess with it. I see a lot of portfolios and I'm constantly telling people to go draw from life models. It's just one of those things you can't learn from looking at other art. Also, please don't learn Life Drawing from adult magazines if you an avoid it. I've got nothing against a spank rag, but those magazines tend to only portray one type of body, and the poses can be fairly limited with a slightly different focus than you'll be looking for. A four year degree in Graphic Design, Illustration or Architecture is totally worth the time and money, as long as they let you sneak in those Life-Drawing classes. That way, if the whole comic thing doesn't work out right away, you'll be able to make a living designing Ketchup bottle labels and remembering the nude, baby-oiled, hairy fat guy from your Life Drawing class.

Several private colleges have focuses in Sequential Art. If you can get Ma and Pa to pony up the kind of cash it takes to go to these places, be my guest. Personally, I'm of the opinion that a degree in Sequential Art from one of these schools is pretty useless. No one in comics is asking to see

your transcript so they couldn't give a flying fart if you have a degree from some expensive private school. Also, most potential commercial art field employers (where they do care about degrees) think Sequential Art is when you lay four Picassos end to end. I see a huge number of portfolios every year, and, purely based on numbers, I don't find that the people from those schools are generally any better than the artists attending any other school. From what I can see, a degree in Sequential Art from a private school is really only good for self satisfaction or purely for love of the medium. If that's enough for you though, by all means, have at it.

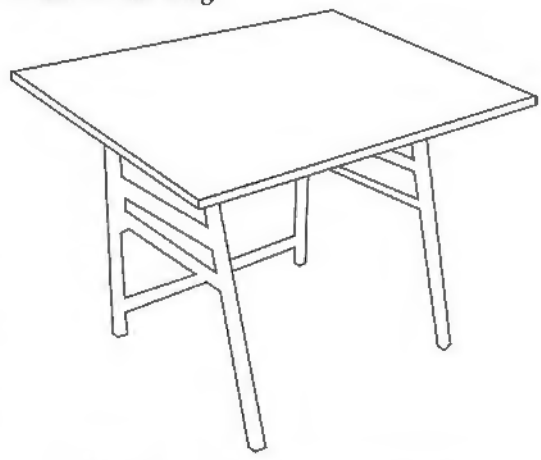
24 HOUR DRAWING PEOPLE

The real schooling for drawing comics is just drawing. A lot. All the time. Comic book artists have to be able to draw everything from skyscrapers to squirrels. A good general rule is to draw everyday for at least an hour or two. Draw your friends, your friends' moms, dachshunds, elevators, ranch homes, ranch dressing...everything. Sooner or later, it'll come in handy. Comic artists really are the most well-rounded illustrators in the world, putting commercial and medical artists to shame with the sheer volume of items they illustrate.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

That's all well and good you say, but what do I need to make it happen, Brother Seeley? I usually find that everyone has their own preferences for paper and pencils, honed over time and with experience, but here's a good general overview of supplies. Of course, it's good to keep in mind that, as technology changes, the way just about everything is done changes. Comic art is no exception. Keep an eye out for new products and changes in technology. You don't want those young punks to have an edge on you.

DRAFTING TABLE and CHAIR- You gotta have somewhere to put your paper and your ass; the kitchen table just ain't gonna cut it. You're going to want an adjustable table, and an adjustable chair. Prices vary, but get something you can be comfortable in. You're going to be spending a lot of time in this thing.

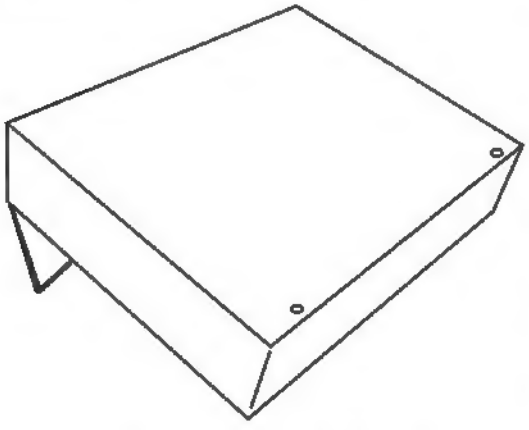


PAPER- Comic art is drawn bigger than printed size for ease and better reproduction. You'll need 11 inches x 17 inches Bristol drawing boards with a 10 x 15 live area. You can go bigger or smaller if you like, but always make sure it's in ratio to the size of a comic book page (6.875 x 10.438). Boards come in a variety of weights and groove (which is its level of "smoothness"). Artists vary as to what they like working on. Personally, I'll draw on whatever someone gives me.

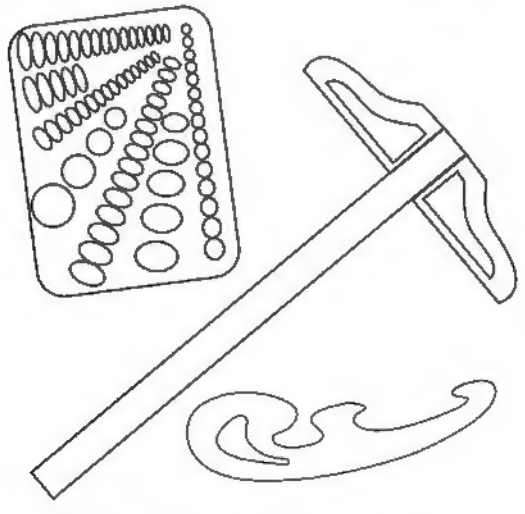
PENCILS- Pencils are also going to be a bit of a personal preference item. In general, you should have a full range of hard and soft leads. Pencil lead comes in a range of Hs and Bs (H for hard, B for black). Bs are softer and thus darker, while Hs are harder and thus lighter. The higher the number in front of the H or B and the lighter or darker it is. Most pencillers work with an HB, H or 2H. I'm an HB man myself. You can use traditional pencils, or buy a lead holder, which is sort of like a mechanical pencil, but nicer and more expensive. I use a Staedtler lead holder. You may want to put one of those pencil grip things on since this thing is going to be sitting in your hand for eight hours a day.

LIGHT BOX- A light box is one of those things you never think about, but once you have one, you can't remember how you lived without it. Light boxes are great for tracing over a sketch and allowing you to draw much cleaner. Tracing photos is also a time-honored comic artist tradition, and

several well-known artists entire styles revolve around the light box and traced photos. Don't feel guilty, but don't overdo it either.



RULERS, TRIANGLES, T-SQUARES, FRENCH CURVES- In general, you can't have enough stuff to help you make straight lines and graceful curves. I recommend picking up a set of french curves, a t-square and a set of triangles to start off with. Add to your supply as you find the need. Most art stores carry this stuff, and I usually grab mine at a Michael's, the Arts and Crafts Store.



PERSPECTIVE GUIDE- Perspective tends to be one of the more tedious tasks of drawing comics. Since architects are always drawing buildings and such, I recommend nabbing their books, which often contain templates for drawing in perspective. A variety of interior design books are especially helpful.

ADOBE PHOTOSHOP AND ILLUSTRATOR COMPUTER PROGRAMS- These two programs can make drawing much easier. You can use Photoshop to compose your reference into panels while Illustrator can be used to figure out especially difficult perspective.

REFERENCE- Unless you have a photographic memory, you'll probably need to look at books and photos to draw the inside of a 747 or the enraged face of a charging capuchin monkey. Have a computer near you and an online search engine ready at all times. The bonus is that you'll always have justification for the nekkid photos on your desktop. I also recommend haunting Borders and Barnes & Noble clearance shelves for good, cheap reference. You'll probably want at least one book of nudes, a photo book of cities and buildings, and one of animals (which will also be nude). A few bodybuilding, fashion, and car magazines wouldn't hurt either.

Got all that stuff? Are you completely broke yet? Good! That'll give ya some serious motivation to get to work!

CHAPTER THREE
LAID OUT

Laying out the page before you get to work drawing is really the most important aspect of drawing comics. You're supposed to be telling a story and your ability to figure out where to put stuff will determine how good of a comic artist you really are.

READING THE SCRIPT

Comic writers come in a variety of flavors from fruity and sweet to hairy and sweaty. And, wouldn't you know it, scripts come in just as many styles. Generally though, there's a few time honored script styles you may face.

MARVEL STYLE- This refers to a script style used most prominently by Stan Lee at Marvel in the good ol' days. Using this term also represents my best chance of getting a cease and desist letter...again. Anyway, this kind of script is generally very loose and leaves a lot up to the artist. Marvel style scripts usually don't include panels or dialogue, but have general descriptions of the story, and leave the pacing up to the artist. These scripts are also known as "holy shit deadline in 10 minutes" scripts. ***(Fig. 3.1)***

(Fig. 3.1)

Page 3-
Barbarian Babe dives into the water to avoid becoming lunch from the hungry T-Rex. She gets underwater and out of harm's way..or so she thinks, when she encounters another monster..some kind of mutant octopus.

FULL SCRIPT- These scripts come from the super anal writers who feel the need to break down every panel, describing everything in detail and often using full dialogue. Alan Moore is the king of this, writing panel descriptions that fill pages. These scripts leave less up to the artist.

Either way, once you get the script, sit down and give it a good long read. Breathe it. Give it a little lick. Make notes on the margin, or draw on it as images come to mind. You want to make sure you know where everything fits and what's most important. ***(Fig. 3.2)***

(Fig. 3.2)

TUB CLUB trailer
9-21-05
Version 1.0
Tim Seeley

Page1-
Open with a shot of the prestigous Franco-Belle College in a cozy East Coast town in the winter.
Caption- Welcome to Charming Franco-Belle College Campus in Massachussets.

Panel 2- A shot of some girls walking out the door, in their uniforms.
Caption- This renowned school for girls enjoys a strong tradition of academic excellence.

Panel 3- A shot of the girl's pool with girls swiimming.
Caption- Students at our school enjoy a rigorous, focused study, which plays to their strengths and allows them to dominate in the classroom. Girls don'tt have to live up to expectations that they must be nice, quiet, non-athletic, and passive at Franco-Belle.

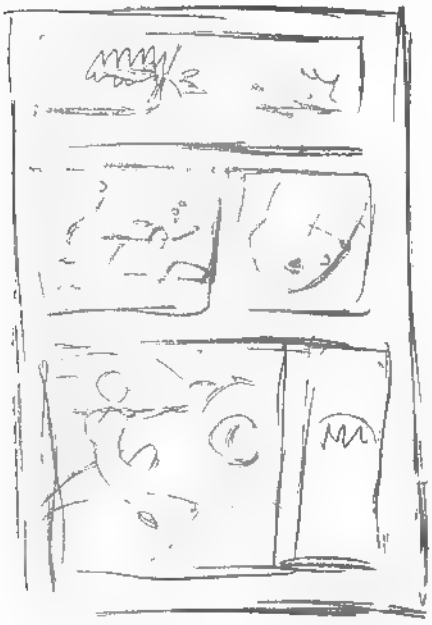
Panel 4- One of the girls motions to several other girls, holding a key to the hot tub room.
Caption- No, Free from the pressures of co-ed schools, the girls at Franco-Belle can excel in leadership...

Panel 5-The lock the door behind them.
Caption- And create strong and lasting relationships....

Page 2-
big shot of the five girls, in the hot tub, makin
TOO NAU

THUMBNAILS- Now you're ready to start breaking the pages down into thumbnails. Thumbnails are small, loose drawings that represent what you're going to do with the actual pages. You can do these as tight or as loose as you feel comfortable with, though, from experience, I can tell you it's better to make them somewhat clear, because nothing sucks as much as looking at a two day old drawing and wondering what the hell you meant. You can decide to thumbnail the entire book before you start drawing, or do it as you go along. ***(Fig. 3.4)***

(Fig. 3.4)



STORYTELLING- There's no way I can tell you everything an artist can consider about storytelling in a 22-page book. There are whole big fat books dedicated to this subject alone. None are better than *Comics and Sequential Art* by Will Eisner. Get it.

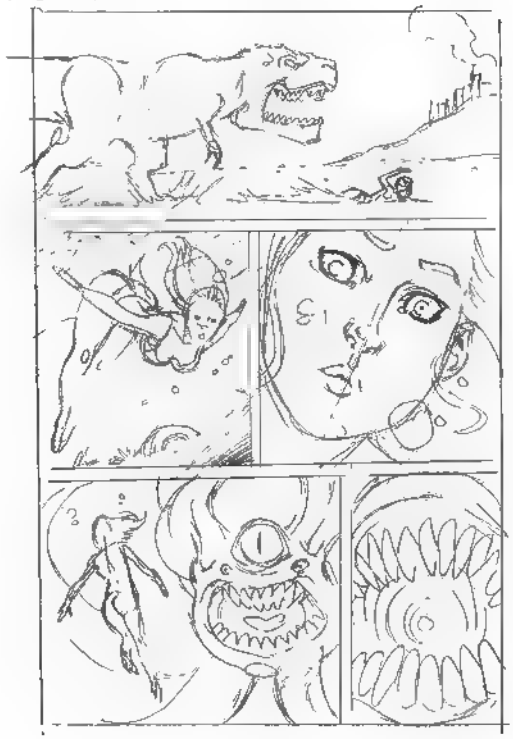
The Layout stage is where you'll determine how best to tell the story. American comics read left to right, and then down in a Z-shaped flow (um…duh). You can help the flow of the page by spotting your black shapes in this formation, or subtly composing your panels so that the panel action moves the reader into the next panel. ***(Fig. 3.5)***

Each page generally has a dominant panel. You'll want to make this panel the biggest one on the page. This isn't always true though. Some pages will contain panels of all the same size (such as the infamous 9-panel grid page).

It's important to remember that each panel is like a photograph or a shot from a movie. Make sure it's well-composed...each panel should be its own composition and fit well with the rest of the page. Also, remember to vary your shots. You're the director of this little paper film...move the camera around the scene to best tell the story. Use angles to best convey the emotion of the scene. If a character is feeling small, pull back and make the figure smaller. If the expression is most important, zoom in, and give the reader some face.

Developing storytelling skill is a learning process, one that's always changing as you work. Most people quickly develop the basics, but it takes a lot of time and thought to get to the really exceptional storytelling skills. There are many classic comics to study for fantastic storytelling. Personally, I recommend studying *Watchmen*, *The Dark Knight Returns,* and *Blankets.* Also, watching films for the way they go from shot to shot can be incredibly informative. Anything from *Citizen Kane* to *Fight Club* can inform your storytelling.

(Fig. 3.5)



AVOIDING "90s SYNDROME"

Ah, the 90s. During the 90s, splashy, art-driven comics were all the rage. Splash pages, big "bad ass" shots, and crazy shaped panels were everywhere. And, sure, it looked kinda cool, but quite often, it told the story like absolute poo poo.

As an artist, it can be difficult to resist the urge to diminish boring-to-draw but essential-to-story stuff in favor of big, bad ass looking stuff. You must resist. There's a time and place for the bad ass, but not at the expense of the story! You may note that this is a bit of a pet peeve of mine, but there are still artists working for the Big Two that regularly screw up a completely good read by injecting a double page spread into a scene and relegating some important moments to tiny panels. It drives me friggin' batshit. It should do the same for you.

LAYOUT TO PAGE

Now, if you're all done with your layouts, you can start on the page. Can I get a "Whoo Hoo?" Depending on your preference, you can simply look at your layouts and transfer them to the board, or you can copy your thumbnails, enlarge them, and trace them (this is where that kooky light box comes in). Try it a few ways, and see what works...whatever helps you make the best pages. ***(Fig. 3.6)***

(Fig. 3.6)

CHAPTER FOUR
IN WHICH WE FINALLY GET TO DRAW THE PAGE

Yes, yes, rejoice…you're drawing a comic book page. Spiffy.

LAY OUT…AGAIN?

Yeah, I bet you thought you were done with this. When you start on the comic page, you're going to want to have the best possible underlying structure to draw over. Almost no one can draw without first providing the shape and structure of the objects they're rendering. So, for every page, you should do a sketch that you can tighten up. If you decided to use your thumbnails as a basis (and they were tight enough), you can simply draw over the top of them on the light box. This works, though I often find these drawings end up a little too tight, and often stiff. Another method is to sketch in with a different colored pencil. This is typically done with non-photo blue, though I've seen people use red, or a harder black lead. Whatever the case, you'll want to make sure it doesn't show up in the ink stage. This is simple with the blue since it doesn't photocopy, and the black since it can be erased. If you use any other color, you'll have to drop it out in Photoshop by adjusting the color channels.

TIGHT OR LOOSE, THAT IS THE QUESTION

Comic artists vary a lot in the "tightness" of their drawings. Some are so tight that they literally include every line weight, every rendering line, and fill in each and every black shape. Others are extremely loose, indicating some shapes for the inker to finish, and leaving the page in an almost sketch-like state. This will vary for a number of reasons, such as deadline, what inker you're working with, whether you aren't being inked at all... generally though, I recommend drawing as tightly as possible, especially when you're first starting out, or when getting familiar with an inker. Tight pages look much nicer and are more likely to impress your editor, and leave less chance for your inker to royally screw up your art. Once you're comfortable with your editor and inker, and if everyone involved is ready, feel free to loosen up and really crank the art out.

YOU GOT STYLE

"Style" is one of those things you hear often in conversations concerning comic artists. Style is actually fairly difficult to categorize and define. There's the dynamic cross hatcher types, and the minimalist, black shape types…the scratchy types and the animated style types…whatever the case may be, over time, you'll develop your own style, which will derive from practice, comfort and interests. My personal style comes from a lifetime of influences from Art Adams to Bernie Wrightson, factoring in the level of detail I can do at a comfortable speed. Hell, when it comes down to it, my style probably has something to do with the length of my arms and the granola bar I had for breakfast. Whatever causes it, you'll get it. Don't be afraid to have obvious influences from other creators, but try to avoid being an exact clone or outright swiping. There's a famous Wally Wood quote that goes "A good artist know when to copy, a great artist knows when to steal." In today's market, with hawk-eyed fans and internet press, I'd say "swiping" should definitely be used in moderation. Swiping gets noticed by readers and editors pretty quickly and usually doesn't make for a great career path (although, admittedly, there are a few complete swipers and clones who make more money than I'll ever make). Your style is your individual "voice." Put as much "you" into it as possible.

INKING – LIVING WITH YOUR TRACER

If you're like most American comic artists, you won't have the time each month to ink your own pencil work, so you'll likely be paired with an inker. Pencillers, notoriously an anal bunch, often need inkers, who are an even more anal bunch, to truly make their art sing. But, working with an inker can be a stressful proposition. Will they accurately portray your work? Is their own style appropriate for yours? The truth is a good inker can make a shitty penciller great, but the opposite is also very true. A bad inker can ruin you.

Generally, when working for bigger companies, you won't get to pick your inker. But, in cases where you can, it's good to know a few inkers that you like and trust. Wannabe pencillers should cruise websites, picking up good wannabe inkers. This is actually easier than picking up a good date on the internet; it won't matter if your inker has a hair lip and a goiter.

If you do end up at one of the majors and are paired with an inker you don't like...take a deep breath. Most likely, it's not as bad as you think. It's hard to look at your own work accurately...fans will most likely respond to it just fine. If it does truly suck chicken butt, calmly ask your editor if he or she thinks it looks okay, and suggest that perhaps this inker is not the absolute best for your style. In comics, as in life, you catch more bees with honey and you'll get better ink if you aren't a dink.

TORTOISE AND HARE

There's 22-pages in the average monthly comic book and roughly 20 weekdays in a month. This means that if you're drawing one monthly book you should be doing a page a day with those two extra pages thrown in there, perhaps following after an easier page. This should be more than enough time to do a comic book. On average, if you want to maintain the schedule of the rest of the world, it should take you about 6-7 hours (or less) per page (this includes the layout stage). If its taking you 14 hours to pencil a page, you may be getting some incredibly beautiful pages, but you should probably move to Spain and work in the European album format. In America, most comics come out monthly. You will have to develop your art to fit this timetable, or it's off the to the world of Original Graphic Novels for you. The best way to get comics done is to actually draw them. Set up a schedule. In the morning, get up with the rest of the world. Eat breakfast and take the commute across your house to your desk. Sit down. Work for four hours. Take a lunch. Draw for four more hours. Now you can hop on your Playstation. If every comic artist could just follow this simple advice, there'd be a lot fewer late comics... and a lot fewer editors with bleeding ulcers and patchy hair.

CHAPTER FIVE
WORKING IN THE BIZ

THE MYTH OF "BREAKING IN

Comic pros will tell you that the one question they are asked above all others is: How do I break in? I think I speak for most of us when I say we hate that question, since it's not an easy answer, and also because we wish people gave more of a shit about our work instead of trying to get their own work out there as competition. But, the simple truth is, there really is no "breaking in" point at which you're suddenly going to get regular work for the rest of your life. Working in any entertainment field is a constant process, not one act that suddenly sets you up. One job leads to a second, which leads to a new friend which leads to another job, etc. It's also possible to get "knocked out" of the field since it's a constantly changing, competitive market—and then it's equally possible to come back and do more work.

PORTFOLIOLOGY 101

The item you're going to need in order to look for work is a portfolio. You should have some kind of binder to contain your best work to show at cons as well as copies of these same pages to distribute to editors. Your portfolio should contain about 8-10 pages of your absolute best sequential art and maybe an attention grabbing cover or two. For the love of God don't put in pages that aren't your best, and tell me, "oh, those are old." Do not include pages that don't represent your best stuff. Leave them at home. Line the cat litter with 'em. Tear them up and make a weird paper nest for yourself. Whatever it is, don't show them to potential employers!

Also, this is the place to show your tightest, most complete pages. Fill in all the blacks. Spiff up the pages...not a smudge on 'em. Keep your portfolio nice and clean. Remove the napkins with ideas scrawled on them and the four leaf clover you found last week. This is the comic industry version of a resume. I have seen some of the worst portfolios on Earth. Please, don't make me go through that again.

You'll most likely be showing your portfolio at comic book conventions. This can be a daunting process; you'll be in line with a hundred other artists, trying to impress a guy who stayed out too

late the night before. Keep at it. If you're good you will get noticed. And, be nice. Be humble and friendly to the editor. You can be raving jerk when you're an old pro.

Sending packets through the mail to big companies is almost useless. Sometimes they won't even take unsolicited submissions, and when they do they're so busy it may take a year or two before your sample gets looked at. I say, do it anyway, but don't be surprised if you don't hear back. It's nothing personal.

THE LITTLE GUYS

Remember this section. This is the best way to get work in comics and also the best way to drive you to an early grave.

Though the comic industry is dominated by two corporate giants, there's a whole host of B level, C-level, even P-level companies. Small press is an extremely important aspect of the comic book industry, providing diversity and a fresh flow of new voices and creators. Though a good portion of small press books suck wind, a number are as good or better than anything put out by Marvel and DC. Your best chance at rising through the comic industry is to draw a good indy comic. When a small press book is good, it will get recognized. Those books' artists get picked up to do other books, often by enterprising Image Comics creators.

Ah, but here's the rub. You'll probably be working for a big wad of jack shit. Small press comic books...even the "successful" ones, sell like crap. Comic readers are so busy spending money on *Spider-Man* and other classics, that most are unlikely to drop the three bucks to make your month of drawing financially worthwhile. You'll just have to get used to this. The majority of one's earliest work in any entertainment field is less lucrative than being a beggar or giving blood. I know actors, book authors, playwrights, jugglers... all of them worked for free for some time before they worked their way into the bigger leagues. It's all about the love of the art, bucko...if you've got what it takes, you'll get there. If not, there are plenty of office jobs that pay right from the first God awful day.

NEPOTISM AND HOW TO MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU

Here's a little known secret: potential employers hire people that they like. Yes, I know, it's shocking, but you'll find this is true all the way from comic books to the highest levels of government. The truth is, I got my job because Josh Blaylock and I met years ago at a comic convention. This really cute blonde girl was at my booth, asking for a sketch, and Josh and his friends came over to hit on her. Instead, they ended up talking to me, and we all became buddies. (Thank you Kate, the super cute blonde girl!)

The comics industry isn't that big of a place. If you have the social skills, and are a likeable person, you'll find you get more work. (Special note to my friends in the industry: I'm not your friend just to get work. I actually like most of you. Well... some of you.)

To this end, I highly recommend you employ a time-tested comic industry technique. Go to the bar. At every convention, you'll find that tired, burnt out industry professionals and up-and-comers like to hang out at a nearby bar. "Bar-Con," as we call it at Devil's Due Publishing is just as important as the show floor for those working in comics. Of course, if you drink too much and tell the Editor in Chief of DC Comics you'd have sex with his mom, Bar-Con can work against you.

EDIT-OR: MASTER OF YOUR UNIVERSE

Editors are going to be your contacts at the companies you're working for, whatever shape or guise they may take. The editor is a very busy, underpaid individual with his or her own opinions, tastes and preferences. You would do well to be nice to your editor, as they determine how long your ass stays on the book, and thus, how long you'll be getting a paycheck (or not, I guess, if it's one of the aforementioned small companies). In any case, you may find that you get along with your editor really well, and that you agree with all of his suggested changes. You may also find that your editor is a blind, deluded asshole. Either way, you're at the mercy of this saint or tyrant, so make the best of it. Editors will often ask for changes to

your art. If you're like most artists, the notion of this makes you quite angry. Change it anyway. If you have a very informed and rational argument to the contrary, bring it up, but approach it like hostage negotiations.

Speaking of hostage negotiation, always remember to communicate with your editor. Most likely, you won't be in the same office with your editor like I am, feeling his cold, dead eyes staring at the back of your head all day. You'll probably have space between you, so emailing and calling are a must. Editors firmly believe artists to be flakey weirdoes who at any moment could drop the whole project and join a sherpa and a llama on a worldwide trek. This opinion is not completely unfounded. Let him know you're still alive, answer his calls and inform him the second you get behind schedule. The editor/artist relationship is important to the creation of good comics...don't be the weak end of the partnership.

HACK/TRASH

Occasionally while working in comics, an editor will have a script come in late, or have a book fast-tracked. In this case, they may ask an artist to "hack" a book out. Hacking, in comics refers to doing a book at a much faster rate than normal, generally at a lower quality to get the book done in time. Some artists find their work isn't affected by upping the rate, others find it makes them crank out more crap than a lactose intolerant person at Cold Stone Creamery. I have buddies who've been asked to hack a book in week. That's 4 pages a day, minimum. Hacking will endear you to the editor you help out, give you a nice check, and destroy your will to live. Readers may notice that the work is suffering, but won't know that it's because someone told you to do it in a week. The reader will simply assume you suck now. Be wary, and hack with caution.

CHAPTER SIX
HOLDING ON

Okay, you're working in the biz. You've got a monthly gig. You're meeting people, signing books, and your pencil has been surgically affixed to your hand. Now, all you have to do is keep it up.

PROMOTE YOURSELF!

These days, the comic industry is moving closer to the "celebrity hype" model of mainstream media, in which often enough the creators are as well-known as the project. This has its ups and downs, depending upon whether or not you can work the "famous" angle rather than the "infamous" angle. It's also something you can exploit to keep yourself working and moving up the ladder.

There are plenty of websites interested in posting interviews with comic creators. Among the best are www.newsarama.com and www.comicbookresources.com. Both are fairly "equal-opportunity" and talk to creators from a variety of levels of popularity. There are also a number of great podcasts such as www.comicgeekspeak.com, which do online radio shows. Sign up on the forums at these sites and others to talk about your new projects.

Posting on forums is a tricky game, with a number of creators coming across as the assholes they truly are. Watch what you type, avoid insulting anyone, and take criticism. After all, in an industry as small as comics, you never know who will be your boss tomorrow.

Establishing a personal website is also a great idea, since it allows for interested readers to see what else you've worked on, as well as contact you directly. This is also invaluable for potential work since editors can look you up and see recent projects. A personal site can also be a great place to sell your original art, or solicit commissions.

There are also comic book themed magazines. *Comics Buyers' Guide* is a well-known and respected monthly publication feature in-depth articles on a variety of companies and creators. And, of course, there's *Wizard: The Magazine of Comics, Entertainment, and Pop Culture*, which, though it tends to focus on a small stable of "fan-favorites," occasionally covers talented newcomers. *Wizard*'s tendency towards "hype-centric" coverage and fan-pandering can, and has been, exploited by savvy creators.

DON'T PUT THAT PIGEON THERE

In Hollywood, there's a fear among actors of being typecast. The comic book equivalent is pigeonholing, which occurs when an artist's style fits a certain genre or type of story so well that it becomes the only type of story they do. This can actually be a positive since getting pigeonholed as a great "superhero artist" or "babe artist" can lead to tons of work and a very successful career. On the other hand being pigeonholed can lead to boredom, or leave you without work. The key to this is just to be aware of what you're working on, how it's being received and whether you're comfortable with it. Be aware of how you're perceived and be flexible if need be. If something seems to really be working for you, you may want to continue in that genre. If not, it might be time to switch it up.

RE-TARDY

The number one factor regarding continuous work in comics is getting your pages done well and on time. When I'm working as a writer and my artist is late as hell, or turns in some crap, there's not a chance I'm letting that guy touch my script again. Put the controller down, step off the Dance Dance Revolution pad, and draw the book. Obviously, life happens, and sometimes extenuating circumstances cause missed deadlines. But, breaking your hand while stopping a robbery is one thing...spending 96 hours watching a Full House marathon when you should have been finishing up pages 19-22 is another. Comic artists have to be hard on themselves and work at least 40 hours a week like everyone else. Just because it's a cool job doesn't mean it's not a job. My dad has to weld on boilers in 90° weather when he doesn't feel like it. The least I can do is perform my cushy fun job when I'm not in the mood to push a pencil. Remember this, and you'll be far ahead of most of the artists currently working.

COMIC BIZ 2099

Occasionally I'll wake up in the middle of the night with a prevailing fear. "I'm a comic artist, finally. But what if comics go away?!" Then, I drink some vodka, pass out and dream about Jessica Biel. But, my paranoia raises a valid point. How viable is a career as a comic book artist? It's a question I don't think enough people ask themselves before packing up their portfolio and heading off to wow an editor.

All entertainment fields are fickle, constantly changing at the whim of the consumer and changing technology. The comics industry is particularly volatile, with books debuting to the sales of 100,000 and dwindling to 20,000 within a year. And, while once comics relied on monthly sales at newsstands, the current model is based around a combination of direct market comic book store sales, trade paperback sales through book chains, and, soon, downloadable comics read on home computers and iPods.

The good news is, it doesn't look as though comics as a medium will go away anytime soon. New publishers are constantly stepping into the mix, comic themed movies attract new readers to the medium, and manga continues to reach out to younger readers.

On the other hand, now more than ever comic artists have to be flexible. As technology improves, the likelihood of art being created entirely on computers grows. If today's comic artist wants to continue working in the field, changing times necessitate keeping an anticipatory eye out for new ways to create images and tell stories. If we keep in mind that it's the medium that matters to us, we'll be ready for whatever changes the future may bring. There's no reason to wake up in the middle of the night, but we all have to make sure we're not sleeping on the job either.

CHAPTER SEVEN
THE END IS THE BEGINNING

There ya have it. As much wisdom as I can pour out, appropriate to a 22-page book shelved near Hulk and The Adventures Of Baby Huey at your local comic shop. I hope I've helped point you in the right direction.

If anything, I think it's best to consider this volume a primer, as the majority of other "How to Draw" books focus on methods of making the art and not the realities and smart ass remarks that I've tried to share with you. I've been where you are. I remember not working in comics and looking through my favorite books knowing I could do it if I was given the chance. The key is to know you can do it, to work tirelessly, never think you're better than you are, and treat everyone you meet in the field with respect.

The job requires so much more than your ability to draw, but you should always be working to keep your art at the top of your game. I've figured out what's keeping me here...I'm a decent illustrator who gets his shit done. But, if it makes you feel better, I'm still working at it...trying to choose new projects that excite me and push my skills, trying to be nice to editors even when they drive me nuts, working to find new readers for my books. There's no "breaking in" point…just a constantly evolving process.

So, I put down my How-To writer hat, and step back into the world of the comic book artist. Slingin' lead. Drawing hot girls and huge, grimacing dudes. The adoring fans. The huge wads of cash.

Okay...maybe not. But I won't mind waking up to do it again tomorrow morning.

Glossary

Big Two – Used to reference Marvel Comics and DC Comics, the dominating comic book publishers in North America. In addition to the Big Two, there are second, third, and fourth tier comic book publishers Most often, an aspiring artist will not receive their first official gig from a Big Two publisher, but rather from any number of other publishers

Caption Box – A title or series of words superimposed over comic book panel action to progress the story along. Captions are often first person or third person point of view

Colorist – The term given for an artist designated to add color to a comic book page following penciling and sometimes inking stages. Comic book colorists come in many varieties, from cartoon-y to painterly, from duel tone to water colored. Today, the predominant amount of published comics is colored using computers

Comicon – An event gathering comic book fans, creators, publishers, retailers, and a wide variety of other interests. Comic book conventions exist across the world, but the biggest and most popular is still San Diego Comic Con International, which brings in more than one hundred thousand fans as well as media outside of comics, including film studios, television networks, video game publishers, prose publishers, and more

Editor – The sometimes maligned manager and policy-maker responsible for the editorial part of publishing This person is usually an artist's main contact with a comic book publisher

Fanboy – A person (usually male, unless designated Fangirl) utterly devoted to a single subject, such as comic books, often to the point of obsession. A fanboy is usually hateful toward the competing subject or viewpoint to his own; these persons can be easily found spending endless hours on Internet message boards.

Freelancer – A person pursuing a profession without long-term commitment or formal alliance to any single employer, selling work or services by hour, day, or project, rather than on a regular salary basis.

Graphic Novel – (or graphic album, OGN) A distinctly larger, usually perfect bound original work of sequential art. Literally: a novel in the form of comic strips.

Inker – The artist responsible for adding black line (today, whether physical or digital) over a penciller's work Not to be confused with a tracer

Layout – A plan or sketch of a comic book page designed to indicate the arrangement and relationship of components

Panel – A distinct portion of a comic page (sometimes called "a shot") in which action takes place

Penciller – (sometimes Penciler) The artist who provides penciled artwork for a comic book, usually from the sketch stage, through thumbnails and layout, to the finished pencil art.

Perspective – An artist technique for portraying size and spatial relationships on a flat surface

Portfolio – A flat, portable case carrying an artist's best illustrated work, usually brought with to comic book conventions, interviews, submissions drives, and portfolio reviews. (Additionally, see submissions packet)

Script – A document by a comic book writer detailing the direction an issue or graphic novel will take Scripts come in many shapes and forms, some taking form akin to a Hollywood screenplay, others more similar to a theatrical manuscript.

Sequential Art – (sometimes, comics, graphic novels) A form of visual storytelling combining cartoon paneling and text captions and balloons. Originally used to illustrate newspaper caricatures and entertain children, it has now grown to become a literary medium with many genres

Speech Balloon – (Sometimes Word Balloon or Thought Balloon) A balloon-shape encircling dialog from a character; sometimes used to represent thoughts as well as spoken words

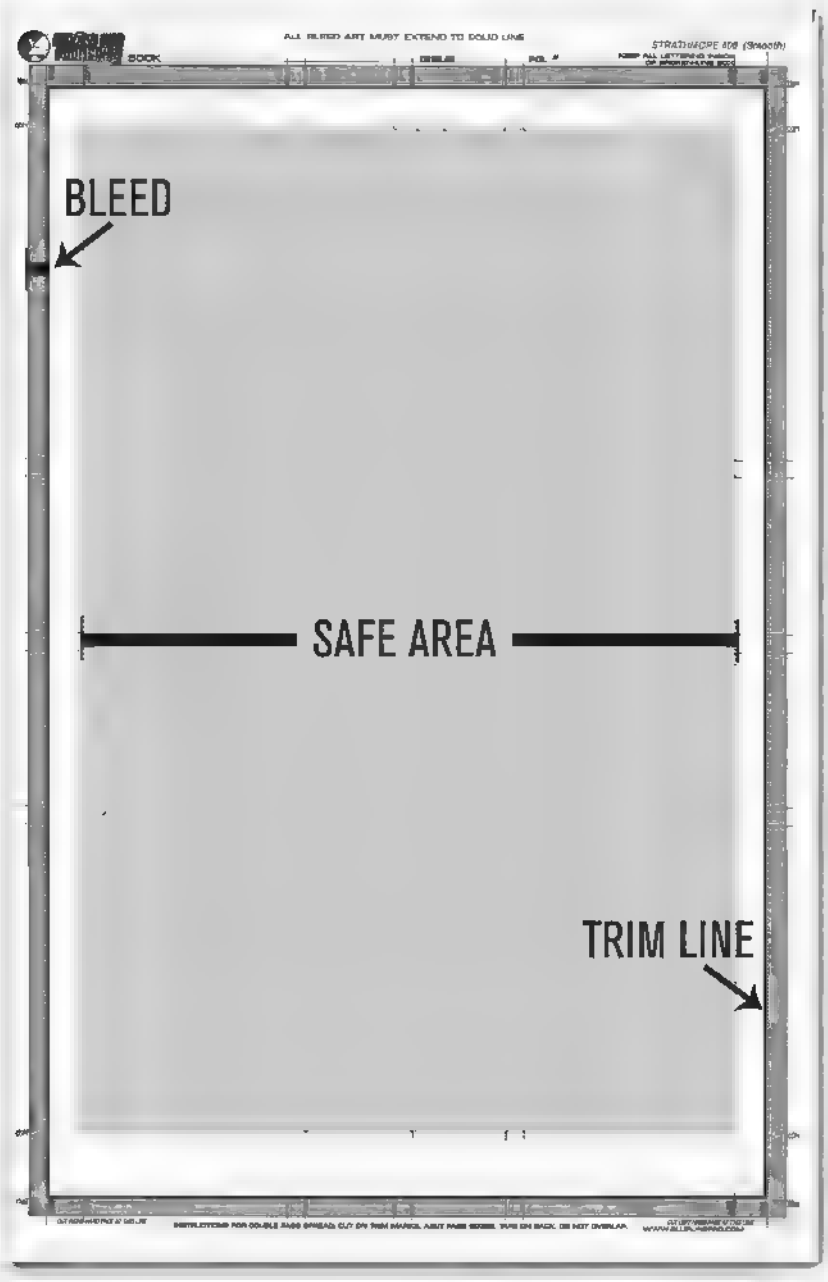
Splash Page – A comic book page consisting of a single panel covering the entirety of the page, including bleed A Splash page is usually utilized in order to draw attention toward a tense or dramatic moment of the story

Spread page – A spread page consists of two full comic pages taken up by a single panel or image, including bleed A spread page is usually utilized in order to draw attention toward a tense or dramatic moment of the story, or to provide an establishing shot for a story location

Storytelling – The telling, writing, or conveyance of stories. For a comic book artist, storytelling is the developed ability to display story details through illustration

Submissions Packet – An assemblage of an artist's best materials presented as a unit in order to garner work from comic book publishers at comic book conventions, or sent to publishers through mail or email

UNDERSTANDING YOUR COMIC PAGE



A standard art board measures 11 inches x 17 inches. While most art boards have important areas such as bleed, trim, and safe area marked, the labels can be difficult to understand.

Safe Area: Active area for panel artwork, captions, balloons, SFX. All elements will be visible in printed version.

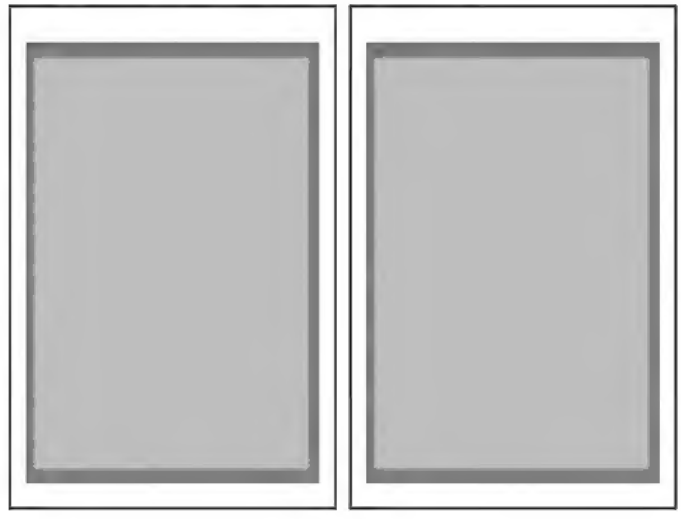
Trim Line: Printer cutoff line; any elements outside this line will not show up in print.

Bleed Area: In print, elements in this area will extend to page edge. Some elements may not be visible.

HOW TO BUILD A DOUBLE PAGE SPREAD

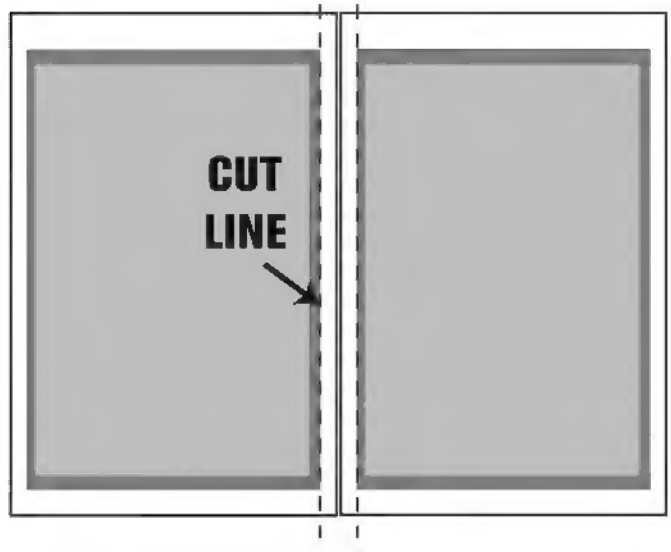
STEP 1:

Get 2 peices of 11x17 art board.



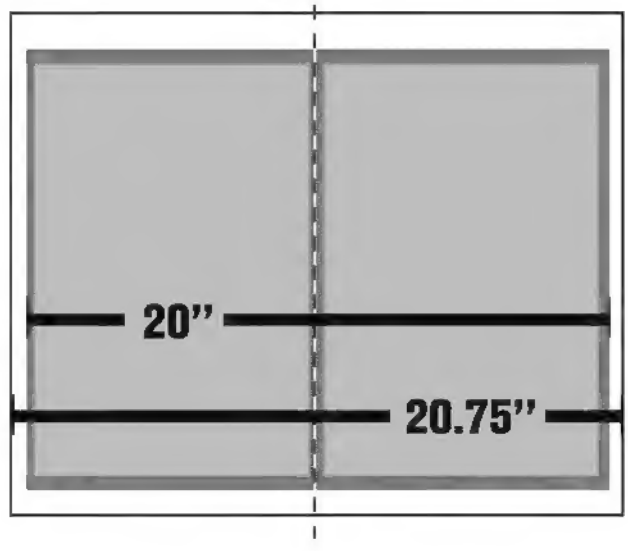
STEP 2:

Next, using a ruler and an exacto-knife, vertically cut off 5/8 of an inch along the corresponding trim lines of each board.



STEP 3:

Place both boards securely against each other at the severed trim line, taping firmly along the back. The unified boards should now measure 20 inches from left trim line to right trim line, and 20.75 inches across the totality of the boards.



SUBMITING FINISHED ARTWORK TO YOUR EDITOR

Sending off your finished pages to the editor requires formatting changes, titling, and file specifications that, while pesky and annoying, are just as important as the drawing part of the process. Most editors will have their own stipulations, but here's Devil's Due's golden rules for submitting finished art.

SAVING YOUR FILE

Despite the enlarged size of the art boards you will be working on, after scanning, your file dimensions should be manually set to 6.875 inches x 10.438 inches. Follow art board guidelines on the previous pages for cropping advice, keeping ¼ of an inch at the edge of your artwork for bleed.

Next, set page resolution at 400 dpi. Many artists will submit artwork at 600 dpi; sure, the image is clearer and crisper, but file size grows exponentially. Additionally, artists sometimes submit artwork at 300 dpi; while still safely within printable quality, 400 dpi just seems like a magic number, and provides the best and most usable results.

Depending on your artistic role, image mode is important to consider before sending your files to the editor. A penciller will usually submit files in either grayscale or CMYK image modes, depending upon whether or not blue line is used (blue line can only be removed if the file is scanned in color). An Inker will save their files as either grayscale or bitmap files; bitmap can only be used if the inks were scanned in bitmap (sometimes labeled "black" on a scanner), but does make the coloring process simpler in most cases. Colorists should always remember that comic books are printed in CMYK image mode, rather than RGB, which is used for on-line media. If a page is colored in RGB and must be changed to CMYK, pay close attention to changes that occur: colors in RGB image mode may not transfer to CMYK.

TITLING YOUR FILE

Titling your file will also depend greatly on the editor's specifications. When in doubt, Devil's Due asks artists to title files as follows: TITLE_issue#_page#.

Example:
HACK/SLASH_01_002.

Depending on your artistic role, place a "p" for pencils or an "i" for inks following the information. Colorists need not add any differentiation to their documents.

Example:
Pencils – HACK/SLASH_01_002p
Inks – HACK/SLASH_01_002i
Colors – HACK/SLASH_01_002

Titling is vitally important when submitting artwork. An editor sometimes handles well over one hundred pieces of individual artwork in a month's time, and unclear designation can make his or her job much more difficult. Refrain from sending files with titles like "Timmyhack/slashpage2"; your editor might not appreciate the extra effort of trying to figure out what the file you have sent actually is.

SAVING YOUR FILE

While saving, designate your file as a

TIFF (.tif) with Image Compression LZW and layer compression ZIP.

Hit save.

Again, check with your editor for unique requirements. This is how artists are required to submit artwork to Devil's Due, but better safe than sorry. A comic book artist should strive to send files per specifications, maintaining professionalism and making certain not to be at fault for any errors throughout the remainder of the publishing process.

BUY STUFF

LEAD HOLDERS: People always ask me where I got my lead holder. Ask no more!!!

- www.staedtler.com
- www.officeworld.com/Worlds-Biggest-Selection/SAN02022/05Q4/
- www.artsuppliesonline.com/catalog.cfm?cata_id=8691

PORTFOLIOS:

- www.portfolios-and-art-cases.com
- www.dickblick.com

COMIC BOOK PAPER:

- www.bluelinepro.com

GENERAL DRAFTING SUPPLIES:

- www.dickblick.com
- www.suppliesnet.com
- www.draftingsteals.com

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THANKS FOR READING!